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SUBJECT: GOVERNOR'S RIVAL DELIVERS IRANIAN COMPLAINT, ASSESSES BASRAH
RECONCILIATION PROSPECTS

REF: BASRAH 93

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CLASSIFIED BY: Louis L. Bono, Director, Basrah Regional Embassy
Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Basrah Provincial Council (PC) member Hasan al-Rashid (Badr) advised Regional Embassy Office (REO) officials on October 18 that the Iranian Consul General, Hamid Baghnan, visited him to protest the presence of British forces at the al-Shalamja crossing on the Iraq-Iran border. Baghnan requested that al-Rashid convey Iran's discontent to British military officials at MND-SE. Al-Rashid further advised the REO that a Basrah Islamic List (BIL) delegation will meet soon with Fadhila representatives to discuss political reconciliation and power-sharing. The REO Director stressed that failure to reach an agreement could undermine Basrah's transition to provincial Iraqi control (PIC), planned for year's end. Al-Rashid also noted that Basrawi tribes, fed up with militia violence, want to form neighborhood watch groups to bolster their own security. Reconciliation among Basrah's political factions and improved security conditions will be crucial to both a successful transition to PIC and to the future stability of Basrah - Iraq's economic heart and the primary source of the GOI's revenue. End Summary.

IRAN PROTESTS UK TROOP PRESENCE ON IRAQ-IRAN BORDER

12. (C) Al-Rashid advised us that Iranian Consul General Hamid Baghnan called on him just after the Eid holiday to report that Iran was "very upset" about the presence of British troops near the Al-Shalamja crossing on the Iraq-Iran border. Baghnan told al-Rashid that the Government of Iran had conveyed the same message to the UK embassy in Teheran, and asked al-Rashid to serve as an intermediary and express Iran's discontent to British military officials in Basrah. Al-Rashid told us that he had not yet relayed the message to the British. He noted that since the March 2007 abduction of British sailors, Iraqi and Iranian border officials have been holding bi-weekly meetings with British military officers to discuss security at al-Shalamja and along the Shatt al-Arab. According to al-Rashid, Baghnan said Iran would be willing to construct a fence along the Shatt al-Arab to help control traffic across the border.

UPCOMING DIALOGUE WILL CLARIFY PROSPECTS FOR RECONCILIATION

13. (C) Al-Rashid, Governor Wa'eli's main political rival, told us that a meeting between the BIL and Fadhila will take place within the next two weeks and this "would reveal the prospects for political reconciliation." In the wake of the Iraqi administrative court's ruling in favor of Wa'eli, al-Rashid proposed a power-sharing agreement to foster reconciliation. (Reftel) Al-Rashid's proposal would have BIL members fill the posts of PC chairman (currently held by Dawa) and deputy governor (Future Iraq Assembly), but allow Wa'eli to remain governor. (NOTE: At an Iftar hosted by the REO, Wa'eli agreed to approach to al-Rashid, but al-Rashid was a no-show. End Note.) Asked whether he thought Fadhila was sincere and whether the parties could overcome the obstacles between them, al-Rashid said "of course there are no obstacles at first; the dialogue will reveal whether we can reach an agreement."

14. (C) Al-Rashid claimed that the BIL holds the upper hand in the negotiations, saying metaphorically that the Governor was adrift at sea, and the BIL was throwing him a line. Al-Rashid said that if the Governor were recalcitrant the BIL would appeal the court's ruling, and al-Rashid expressed confidence BIL would succeed. Al-Rashid said that he and his colleagues had held back much of their evidence against the Governor at the initial proceeding "to avoid chaos in Basrah," but they are prepared to introduce new evidence on appeal.

15. (C) The REO Director said that reaching an agreement would be crucial to avoiding political disarray in Basrah in the lead up to PIC. The Director stressed that failure to reach a power-sharing agreement could undermine a successful transition to PIC, lead to mutual recrimination among the parties, and damage them all politically. The Director added that the Baswari people would continue to suffer. He argued that reaching an agreement would therefore be in everybody's

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interests. The Director suggested that the parties form a "grand coalition" under which they could all see Basrah through the PIC transition and then let the upcoming provincial elections settle their disputes. Striking the pose of statesman, al-Rashid said that the BIL was reaching out to the Governor for the sake of Basrah, that healthy political parties were key to democracy, and that sniping at each other was not the way forward. Al-Rashid also noted (as has Governor Wa'eli) that replacing the PC chairman and deputy governor would require a vote in the Provincial Council to ratify any agreement reached by the parties.

SECURITY IN BASRAH GENERALLY IMPROVING; TRIBES MORE ENGAGED

16. (C) Al-Rashid described Basrah as "a little more normal." Al-Rashid said that he met with Iraqi Security Chief, General Mohan Hafith Fahad, on October 15 and sensed the General's "seriousness on security." As an example of Mohan's willingness to confront local militias, al-Rashid recounted that, after Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) gunmen recently took two armored vehicles from the Iraq Security Forces (ISF), the General sent his forces to retrieve the vehicles and dismissed the two officers that had released them. Al-Rashid also said he believed the Iraqi Coast Guard was doing a better job of patrolling the Shatt al-Arab river.

17. (C) Al-Rashid noted that Basrah's tribes were eager to assume a more active role in providing their own security. He said that local tribal leaders visited him soon after the two recent assassinations of the Muthanna and Diwaniya governors and requested his assistance in creating neighborhood watch groups. Al-Rashid was circumspect: while he welcomed the tribes' interest in helping to improve Basrah's security, he insisted

that any such initiatives be incorporated into the official security apparatus. Al-Rashid suggested as an alternative that the tribes go to General Mohan and request that ISF or Iraqi police be assigned to their respective areas. He is reluctant to see independent, armed groups sprout up throughout Basrah, as they could morph into militias, and further muddle the security environment.

18. (C) COMMENT: Al-Rashid is a cagey, savvy politician, and he appears confident that his BIL commands the high ground vis-a-vis Governor Wa'eli and Fadhila, notwithstanding the recent court ruling in the latter's favor. Al-Rashid and his colleagues may therefore be unlikely to compromise significantly on their demands for the Governor to share power. On the other hand, buoyed by the ruling, Governor Wa'eli is unlikely to see al-Rashid's proposal as a lifeline from a gracious competitor. The REO will continue to implore all sides to act magnanimously and make the necessary, difficult compromises for the parties to reconcile politically. Their failure could have negative ramifications not just for ordinary Basrawis, but for Iraq as whole. Without an agreement to which all the local parties assent, Basrah's political terrain will provide little traction by year's end for PIC to take hold. And if a rocky transition to PIC worsens Basrah's already tenuous security, Iraq's economic heart and the primary source of the GOI's revenue could deteriorate dramatically.
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